

EXPOSITION OF FIRST CORINTHIANS 7 VERSE 15
DOES "NOT IN BONDAGE" MEAN REMARRIAGE?

by **David Lee Burris**

Questions About Marriage

Instruction, Restrictions, Present Distress, liberties

Marriage Vows To Be Kept

The One Exception

Except For Sexual Immorality

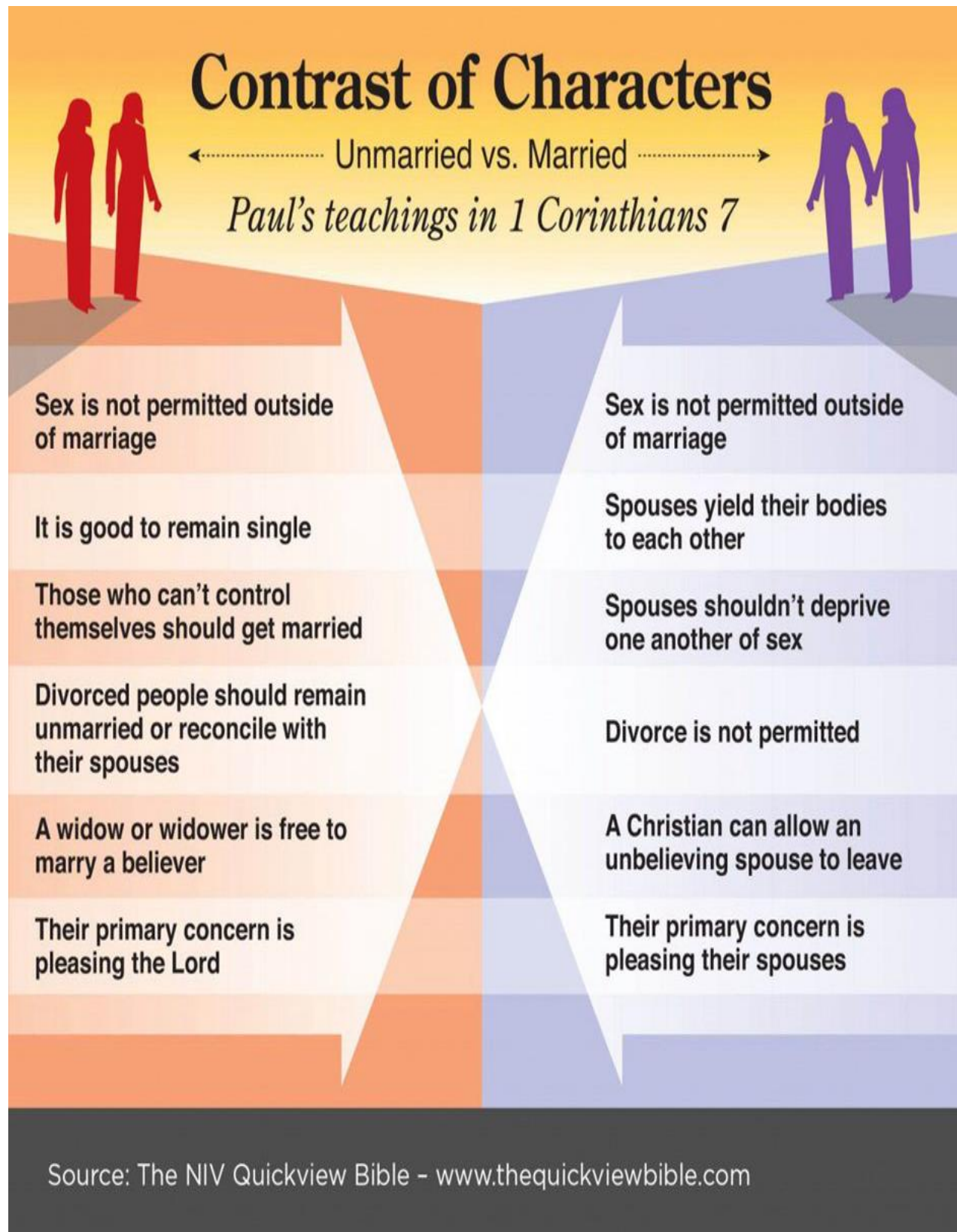
Matt 5:32; 19:9

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|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Abuse | • Irritability |
| • Alienation of affection | • Irreconcilable differences |
| • Desertion | • Irresponsibility |
| • Drunkenness | • Insanity |
| • Drug abuse | • Imprisonment |
| • Incompatibility | • Etc. |



Verse 15 In The Larger Context Of the Chapter & Of The Epistle:



Questions About Marriage

A Study of 1 Corinthians 7

Bob Waldron

The first century was a melting pot of religions, philosophies, and ideas. We would have expected the Gentile world to reflect this diversity, with their “gods many, and lords many” (1 Cor. 8:5). It takes us by surprise, however, to learn how much diversity there was among the Jews: the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Herodians, the Alexandrian school of Philo, and others. As is so true today, this witch’s brew had a very strong impact upon the church.

A great deal of the New Testament deals with errors that beat upon the early church. One can read scarcely more than a page without finding a warning against false teachers, or a passage dealing with false doctrine. Think how much space is devoted to dealing just with Judaism.

History records that there came to be a very strong element in the church that emphasized fasting, celibacy, and other forms of self-denial and physical affliction (Schaff 2:174–84). **A study of 1 Corinthians 7 implies that there was a strong feeling at Corinth that celibacy was a holier state than marriage** – which had led to these problems:

1. Contention for *spiritual* marriages, without sexual activity present.
2. An argument that it would be better to dissolve marriages, especially if the marriage involved an unbeliever.
3. An argument that since celibacy was a holier state, it would be preferable not to marry.

Whether, indeed, these were the specific issues raised by the Corinthians, they are the ones Paul discusses. It is ironic that part of the Corinthian reaction was probably based upon teaching against the sins of the flesh. Their reaction took an odd angle and went awry. Likewise, it is ironic to see the odd positions and the false positions that brethren today have taken with this chapter as their basis:

1. Each person has the right to be married, no matter what their condition may be regarding prior marriages (7:1–4).
2. It is all right to divorce (7:10–11).
- 3. Divorce because of desertion permits remarriage (7:15).**
4. God does not want anyone to get out of his marriage, no matter what the circumstances (7:17–24).

Background

In men's service to God there has always been a tendency to substitute what they think is holy for what God thinks is holy. The Jews of Isaiah's day asked why the Lord did not seem to be paying much attention to their fasting (Isa. 58:3a). The Lord answered that their fasting was of their own choosing, and that such a demonstration of piety was at odds with their behavior. He asks,

Is this the fast that I have chosen? The day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to Jehovah? (Isaiah 58:3)

The Lord has His own ideas of how a man should demonstrate his piety, through loosing the bonds of wickedness, setting the captive free, feeding the hungry, but the Jews ignored these things (Isa. 58:6–9).

After the return from captivity **the people asked the priests, “Am I supposed to weep in the fifth month?” (Zech. 7:3). In this masterpiece of satire, the Lord shows that the “weeping” of the people had certainly not been spontaneous,** and of their fasting He says, “When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month, even these seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?” (Zech. 7:5).

In the letter to the Colossians Paul dealt with a form of Judaism that involved not only the worship of angels, but **self chosen worship that involved a host of regulations: “Handle not, nor taste, nor touch” (2:21).** Paul observed that these “things have indeed a show of wisdom in self chosen worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Col. 2:23).

Such things as fasting and celibacy have long had an appeal to certain ones as a way of calling attention to themselves that they are especially holy. The Lord warned against those who would do alms, or pray, or fast, merely to make a show (Mt. 6:1–18).

God gives men room to express their devotion to Him in special ways of their choosing, such as fasting, but we need to **beware of those who would take their own personal practices and turn them into law for others. Paul warned Timothy of those who would forbid to marry and command to abstain from meats, thus turning what should be a matter of personal choice into law** (1 Timothy 4:3).

In the New Testament, there is abundant evidence that there were many cases where legitimate teaching was extended beyond the bounds of God's intentions and meaning. Several of these things are dealt with in 1 Corinthians. Teaching against the participation in the worship of idols easily resulted in the idea that it is better not to eat meat at all (Rom. 14:2, 14–21; 1 Cor. 8; 10:14–33).

Commandments to put to death the flesh (Col. 3:5), to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11), perhaps raised questions about the propriety of sexual activity in any capacity. Finally, **commandments dealing with association with sinners possibly raised questions about having an unbelieving partner** (1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1).

It seems most logical to suppose that such attitudes and teachings as we have described form the backdrop for the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7, and we will proceed on this basis.

The arrangement of the book bears witness that in chapter 7 Paul begins to deal with specific issues raised by the Corinthians in a letter written to him (7:1). His answers imply that, rather than asking simple questions, the Corinthians had brought up issues and had presented arguments.

It also seems reasonable that we can determine the various topics raised by the use of the expression, “Now concerning . . .,” which introduces them. This expression is found in 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; and 16:1. We must note, however, that Paul was an inspired apostle, and this first letter to the Corinthians is well-structured, so his writing was not merely reactionary.

Most students agree that the things Paul deals with in the first six chapters of 1 Corinthians are things he has heard. But some of the things he deals with **after** 1 Corinthians 7 and 8, such as 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, and chapter 15, bear the earmarks of being matters Paul felt he must discuss, but which were not included in the letter the Corinthians wrote. Therefore, Paul took the things he had heard (1 Cor. 1:11; 5:1 e.g.) and interwove his treatment of them with his discussion of the issues raised by the Corinthians to form a coherent, well-structured, inspired essay.

Analysis of the Chapter

Gordon Fee makes a compelling argument that **the theme of the chapter is: “Remain in the situation you are, and be faithful to the Lord”** (268). In chapter seven, twice we have the words: “Now concerning” (7:1; 7:25), but the first time, the heading seems to apply to more than just verses 1–16. For our study, we will divide the chapter into three parts: (1) 7:1–16: Instructions regarding the marriage relationship; (2) 7:17–24: Unifying theme; (3) 7:25–40: “Because of the present distress, it is preferable to keep virgin daughters unmarried, but if they marry, it is not sinful.”

Instructions regarding marriage (7:1–16). One of the common errors being taught today is based on the theme of the chapter: remain as you are. The argument is that no matter what the situation of your marriage is, abide in it. Such a generic application of this theme is patently erroneous. It assumes that nothing can make a marriage relationship unscriptural. Then should the polygamist remain a polygamist?

In this very letter, Paul says that some of the Corinthians had been adulterers, but they did not abide in that state (1 Cor. 6:9–11). It was unlawful for Herod to have the wife of his brother Philip (Mark 6:18). The theme of this chapter provides no proof for abiding in adulterous marriages.

Responsibilities of the marriage partners (7:1–7). In verses 1–7 the apostle discusses marriage from a limited viewpoint. Paul does not mean to be giving in these verses a full, balanced view of the marriage relationship. **He is actually countering arguments made in favor of celibacy.**

“It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” The context makes it clear that this is not Paul’s argument; it is the argument of the Corinthians. Apparently, some of the Corinthians were arguing that celibacy is the most holy state, and that therefore it is better not to indulge in a sexual relationship, even in marriage.

Paul was celibate himself (7:8). There were some advantages in being celibate. In his discussion of this issue the apostle walks carefully. On the one hand he concedes and even affirms the advantages of celibacy, but on the other, he carefully avoids attributing to it some special holiness, and he also affirms the advantages of marriage. So, he says, yes, celibacy is fine (*kalos*, morally excellent), but there are realities of life that cannot be ignored: some people cannot remain celibate easily. Such people might find themselves so powerfully drawn to sexual activity that they would commit fornication. To avoid this, “Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.” Note that this verse both establishes **Paul’s argument that sexual activity is right in its proper setting, and it abolishes any vestige of polygamy under the Testament of Christ.**

Apparently, some of the Corinthians were urging married couples to maintain *spiritual* marriages in which sexual activity had no part, because Paul deals with this very situation. But, **in marriage, sexual activity is not a defilement; it is an obligation.** Sexual activity in marriage should be an outgrowth of love and an expression of love, but **it is also something that is owed.** When two people enter into the marriage relationship they must realize this and be prepared to fulfill the responsibilities involved.

At its best the sexual act is a bonding of bodies and souls and hearts, but it is not always at its best. Sometimes it is a release for desire that builds until one of the partners may be tempted because of incontinency. When Paul says, “Defraud ye not one the other,” he is warning lest one partner rob the other of what is rightfully his or hers. **Rather than a partner thinking he is being more holy by withholding himself from sexual activity, he is sinning and defiling himself spiritually by cheating his partner of what is rightfully hers.**

Paul says that if a couple agrees to forego sexual activity for a time, it needs to be for actual spiritual activity, not just to make a point of how holy somebody is. It must be temporary, and it must be with the consent of *both* partners, not something imposed by one partner upon the other. Verse 4 makes the point clear that sexual activity should be engaged in based on the need of the one who desires it, not upon the reluctance of the one who does not desire it.

Paul does not belittle one who has very strong sexual urges. Rather, he helps us to have a balanced approach to the matter. **On the one hand we must remember that no weakness, no strength of desire is ever a justification for sin. In this same letter the apostle teaches that God will not allow us to be tempted above what mortals can bear (1 Cor. 10:13). On the other hand, Paul views marriage as a respectable measure God provided for such a one to take to avoid incontinency.** The point is that when one with strong desires gets married so that those desire can be met, do not let the plan be defeated by a partner who refuses to meet the needs of his mate.

The words, “This I say by way of concession, not of commandment” (7:6), refer to a couple’s refraining from sexual activity for a time. There is certainly no obligation, no reason to do so, except that at times it might be expedient for one who wishes to concentrate on prayer. Most authorities point out that the addition of the words, “and fasting,” are by a later hand and provides evidence of an ascetic spirit that came to characterize a vast segment of the church in later times (Meyer 6:147; Findlay 2:823; Willis 178).

When Paul says, “I would that all men were even as I myself,” does he mean unmarried, or does he mean having continency? As a matter of fact, Paul had continency, and he was unmarried, and in his view, the two are related: “If they have not continency, let them marry” (vs. 9). In the latter half of verse 7 the apostle says, “Howbeit, each one hath his own gift from God, one after this manner, and another after that.”

It makes more sense to me to think that in these words he is contrasting the gift of one who can remain unmarried and holy with the gift of one who can be married and holy. Thus, Paul does not join the ascetics who affirm celibacy as the higher state, but places marriage on a full equality so far as being holy is concerned. In view of these observations, I think that when Paul said he wished *all men were as he, he meant unmarried, but underlying that is also his ability to contain his desires.*

To the unmarried and to widows (7:8–9). To the unmarried and widows Paul says it is good for them to abide even as he, namely, unmarried, but if they cannot contain their sexual desires, **it is better to marry than to burn. The word burn (*purousthai*) means to burn with sexual desire, not to burn in hell** or the like (Thayer 558; Findlay 2:825). Note also the similar use of this word in 2 Corinthians 11:29.

The advice Paul gives here, that it would be good not to marry, must be balanced with what he says elsewhere: “I desire therefore that the younger widows marry, bear children, rule the household, give no occasion to the adversary for reviling” (1 Timothy 5:14). Paul also recognizes that the primary sphere of the woman is the home and the rearing of children (1 Timothy 2:15).

Again, therefore, the ascetics cannot argue that Paul agreed with them that celibacy is holier. No, in this context, he argued that it is more convenient, not holier. As always, the scriptures are balanced in their dealing with the things of life. **It is men who get off balance by focusing upon isolated passages while neglecting others, or by substituting will-worship and false humility for the ordinances of God.**

Permanence of marriage (7:10–16).

(1) Of married believers (7:10–11). Though the contrast between verses 10–11 and verses 12–16 makes it clear that Paul deals first with marriages between believers and then with marriages between believers and unbelievers, it is important that he says in verse 10, “To the *married* I give charge.” In other words, **the responsibility to maintain a marriage is as much a duty of an unbeliever as that of a believer.** Paul makes a distinction because he presumed that the unbeliever would not be listening to his charge, or that if he heard it, he would disregard it.

When the apostle says, “Yea, not I but the Lord,” he was certainly not saying that the Lord’s words are more inspired than his. He was **simply saying that he did not need to give a commandment on this matter; the Lord had already given one. The commandment of the Lord given in Matthew 19:6, 9, is the command to which Paul refers.**

I call your attention to Matthew’s account for this reason: one of the current errors being taught about marriage and divorce is that the alien sinner is not subject to God’s law on marriage. In Matthew’s account, when the Lord had spoken, His disciples said, “If the case of the man is so with his wife, it is not expedient to marry” (19:10). Jesus responded, “Not all men can receive this saying, but they to whom it is given” (19:11). **He proceeded to tell to whom “this saying” would not apply. “There are eunuchs, that were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are eunuchs, that were made eunuchs by men: and there are eunuchs, that made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God’s sake.** He that is able to receive it, let him receive it” (19:12). These categories all have one thing in common: they refer to men who will not marry. These are the only ones to whom the Lord’s statement does not apply. **Conspicuously absent is any comment to the effect that the commandment of the Lord does not apply to unbelievers. It does not apply to those who do not marry. It applies to everybody else. Period!**

This commandment of the Lord not only is present in verses 10 and 11. It also underlies Paul’s specific instructions in 12–16.

“Let not the wife depart from her husband.” The word depart is *choristhenai*. “In middle and passive the verb passes into the meaning ‘separate oneself from,’ ‘depart,’... The word has almost become a technical term in connection with divorce, as in 1 Cor. 7:10, 11, 15” (Moulton and Milligan 695–96). It does not have the meaning of *separation* in English, that is, as distinguished from divorce. Jesus said that whoever divorces his partner makes her an adulteress (Mt. 5:32), and it works the same way for either partner (Mk. 10:11–12).

“But should she depart, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband” (7:11). Many have taken this verse to mean that it is all right with God to get a divorce for any reason as long as one remains single. Such reasoning completely misses the point of this passage. It also flies directly in the face of what Jesus said in Matthew 5:32: “Everyone who divorces his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, makes her an adulteress.” Obviously, therefore, one is not at liberty to put away his partner at will, for any cause, because by doing so he makes her an adulteress.

Of course, **Jesus did not mean automatically, then and there, makes her an adulteress. The latter half of the verse makes it clear that her subsequent marriage is contemplated.** It takes two to commit adultery. She would become an adulteress at the same time as the *whosoever* that married her committed adultery. So, the idea of the expression, “Makes her an adulteress,” is not merely to stigmatize her as an adulteress (Lenski 230–35). Also, the definition of adultery as breaking covenant is not supported by this verse because the *whoever* that marries her when she is put away commits adultery whether he has been married before or not. Whose covenant would he be breaking?

The point of 1 Corinthians 7:10–11 is *do not divorce. If the situation of divorce occurs, sin has been committed. Paul’s instructions are to halt the sin process; do not let the situation get even worse. Let her remain unmarried.* Her divorce from her husband results in her being unmarried, but she is still bound under the obligation she took up before God to remain married to her husband. In this very chapter Paul says, “A wife is bound for so long time as her husband liveth” (1 Cor. 7:39; cf. Rom. 7:2–3). There are only two things in all of scripture that are said to release, or to provide release, from this bond. The primary thing is death, and the other thing is sexual immorality on the part of one of the partners (Mt. 19:9).

“Let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled unto her husband.” Merely *because each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband does not mean that this woman can marry whomever she wishes.* If she wishes to be married, she has *one* option: be reconciled to her husband. And, of course, all these principles apply equally to the husband: “and that the husband leave not his wife” (7:11b).

Of believers married to unbelievers (7:12–16). “But to the rest say I, not the Lord ...” (7:12). Who is the rest? The context must identify who these are. They are believers married to unbelievers. These marriages would have been because one of the partners was converted, and the other was not. There is certainly no encouragement here for a believer to marry an unbeliever.

It is argued that Paul’s language implies that Jesus’ teaching did not include such marriages. We have already shown, however, that Jesus excluded from His instructions only those who would not marry (Matthew 19:10–12). The point is that Jesus did not specifically address the situation of a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever.

Some of the Corinthians apparently were arguing that in such marriages the believer was defiled, and were urging that such marriages be terminated. On the face of it, that would not appear to be a bad idea. I have encountered many situations in which a believer was put through torture by an unbelieving partner. How easy it would be just to walk away. But what does Paul say? “If any brother hath an unbelieving wife, and she is content to dwell with him, let him not leave her. And the woman that hath an unbelieving husband, and he is content to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband” (1 Cor. 7:12–13). **Notice that *no option is given to the believer to divorce the unbelieving mate.*** Why is this? It is because even such marriages rest on the basis of the principles laid down by Jesus. The problem is that the unbeliever does not recognize the dominion of Jesus. This is why **Paul addresses the situation specifically. He flatly denies the idea that the unbeliever should be put away, or even could be put away.** The variable is whether the unbeliever will be content to remain in the marriage. If he is, then the believer has no right to terminate the marriage. The reasons why are those laid down by Jesus. Paul is really only making specific application of what Jesus taught.

For our purposes, and in our limited space, we are not going to deal with verse 14. Instead, let us move on to verse 15. “Yet if the unbelieving departeth, let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us in peace.” **There is, of course, a difference between running the unbeliever off, and having him to leave or to desert.** It must be understood that in such circumstances, the believer has made a good faith effort to fulfill the responsibilities of marriage, and, still, the unbeliever will have none of it.

“Let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases.” The debated question is the meaning of “not under bondage.” The verb in this passage is *dedoulotai*, which comes from *douloō*, “to make a slave of, reduce to bondage” (Thayer 158). It is related to *doulos*, which is commonly translated slave or bondservant. On the other hand, the word *bound* in 7:39 and in Romans 7:2 is *dedetai* from *deo*, which means *to bind* (Thayer 131).

The fact is we have two different terms, and they are used in two different senses. The meaning of *deo* in 1 Corinthians 7:39 and in Romans 7:2 is carefully defined in the context. The meaning of *dedoulotai* is not carefully and specifically defined in the context of 1 Corinthians 7:15. There is absolutely nothing in this context that indicates that the phrase, *not under bondage*, means that the believer can get married again. Unless the context **defines** the expression, then we have no right to devise our own definition. The words, by definition, merely mean “is not a slave.”

Scholars pretty well agree that the subject of remarriage is not dealt with in the passage. Therefore, the most that can be extracted from these words is that if the unbeliever is determined to leave, the believer is not a slave and does not have to be willing to accept any dictates the unbeliever demands.

It is a matter of some controversy, but verse 16 seems to be presenting another reason why a believer should be willing to remain with an unbelieving partner, though certainly not the primary reason. The thrust of verses 12–16 is do not think that you need to leave your unbelieving partner. Verse 16 gives another reason why: You may save your mate. **Paul does not recommend marrying an unbeliever as a means of evangelism!** This case is one in which one partner is converted, and the other is not.

Unifying theme: holiness does not demand a change in one's social status (7:17–24). In verses 17–24 Paul's point is, "Brethren, let each man, wherein he was called, therein abide with God" (7:24). Note, however, that every example used is either a matter of custom, or social status. Surely the point is clearly established in the Bible that repentance demands a putting away of sin, and a change of life (Rom. 6:1–11; Eph. 4:17–32). Sometimes we foolishly think that holiness is external, and that a change of circumstances would be bound to make us holier. Holiness is something that is in the heart and radiates out into the life (Mt. 12:34; Prov. 4:23).

Now concerning virgins (7:25–40). Time and space do not permit a thorough exposition of this section, but the issues dealt with in this section are not as pertinent to current questions as those in 7:1–16. *Paul makes it clear that he is giving advice and not commandments in this section (7:25). Those who are wise, and can do so, would do well to follow his advice. But if some choose to do otherwise, they have not sinned.*

"I think therefore that it is good by reason of the distress that is upon us, namely, that it is good for a man to be as he is" (7:26). What was this distress? Some say that it was the oncoming dangers that constantly faced the church. This explanation cannot be true, however, because it would require Paul's advice in 1 Timothy 5:14, that the younger widows marry, to be the same as it is here, that they not marry. No, this present distress is not specified, and we cannot know for sure what it was. We do not know what it was, how widespread it was, or how long it lasted. The Corinthians knew, and it is important for us to emphasize that this distress clearly affected a great deal of what Paul said. Therefore, **his advice regarding whether to marry is not to be construed as general law for all time.**

It makes more sense to me to think that the virgins in the section are daughters, though the word daughters is not in the original. For our purposes, this is not a crucial question. It is more crucial to ask: **Is Paul arguing that celibacy is to be preferred in verses 32–34? In the present circumstances, yes; in general, no.** Paul did not write to suit one party or another. It should be obvious that if one has continency (7:9) **there are distinct advantages to celibacy. His celibacy certainly left Paul's life relatively uncluttered.** But, again, **Paul does not argue that celibacy is holier. He argues that it is more convenient.** Remember verse 7: "Each one has his own gift from God, one after this manner, and another after that."

If one seeks to use verse 34, “that she may be holy both in body and in spirit,” to say that the virgin is holier than the married woman, his effort contradicts Hebrews 13:4, “Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled.” Such an interpretation also raises the interesting question: Was Paul, then, holier than Peter? Paul was unmarried, while Peter had a wife (1 Cor. 9:4). Paul affirmed his right to lead about a wife that is a believer (1 Cor. 9:5). He had simply chosen not to take advantage of that right because of the circumstances in which he found himself as he traveled about in his preaching and faced the persecutions that came his way.

Finally, in verse 39, Paul states that a woman is bound to her husband as long as the husband lives. Death severs the bonds that hold a man and woman together. The only other thing found in scripture that can do so is the sexual immorality of one’s partner (Mt. 19:9). Let us put it like this. The most general rule about marriage and remarriage is that one who is married to a second partner is in adultery. The two exceptions are: (1) unless the first partner is dead (7:39), and (2) unless the first partner has been guilty of sexual immorality (Mt. 19:9).

On the other hand, here is a statement to which I find no stated exception: “He that marrieth one that is put away from a husband committeth adultery” (Lk. 16:18). Jesus taught that if a man put away his wife for some reason other than fornication, he made her an adulteress (Mt. 5:32). In this case we see an innocent partner put away. If she marries again, she is an adulteress, and whoever marries her commits adultery (Mt. 5:32).

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¹ Waldron, B. (1996). [Questions about Marriage: A Study of 1 Corinthians 7](#). In F. Jenkins (Ed.), *Christ and Culture at Corinth: Lessons from First Corinthians* (pp. 128–142). Temple Terrace, FL: Florida College Bookstore.

DOES 1ST CORINTHIANS 7:14 TEACH THAT A NON-CHRISTIAN IS “SANCTIFIED” (SAVED) BY BEING MARRIED TO A CHRISTIAN? “WHAT DID PAUL MEAN IN 1 CORINTHIANS 7:14 WHEN HE SAID THAT AN UNBELIEVER IS ‘SANCTIFIED’ BY A CHRISTIAN SPOUSE?”

THE PASSAGE UNDER CONSIDERATION READS AS FOLLOWS:

FOR THE UNBELIEVING HUSBAND IS MADE HOLY [SANCTIFIED ASV] BECAUSE OF HIS WIFE, AND THE UNBELIEVING WIFE IS MADE HOLY BECAUSE OF HER HUSBAND. OTHERWISE, YOUR CHILDREN WOULD BE UNCLEAN, BUT AS IT IS, THEY ARE HOLY" (1 CORINTHIANS 7:14; ESV).

FIRST, THE BIBLE STUDENT MUST COMPREHEND MEANING OF THE TERMS “HOLY” OR “SANCTIFIED” AND THE VARIOUS WAYS THE ORIGINAL GREEK WORD WAS USED BY THE SACRED WRITERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THE WORD APPEARS IN TWO GRAMMATICAL FORMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. THE NOUN IS HAGIASMOS. IT IS FOUND TEN TIMES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND IS RENDERED BY THE ENGLISH TERMS “HOLINESS” AND “SANCTIFICATION” (CF. ROM. 6:19, 22; 1 COR. 1:30; 1 THESS. 4:3-4, KJV).

THE VERB IS HAGIAZO. IT OCCURS TWENTY-NINE TIMES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND IS TRANSLATED IN THE KJV AS “SANCTIFY” (MT. 23:17, 19), “HALLOW” (MT. 6:9), AND “BE HOLY” (REV. 22:11). KINDRED TERMS FROM THE SAME STEM APPEAR AS “HOLY,” “HOLINESS,” “SANCTUARY,” “SAINT,” ETC.

BASICALLY, TO BE SANCTIFIED CARRIES THE CONCEPT OF “HAVING BEEN SEPARATED FROM (SOMETHING), SET APART.”

IN CLASSICAL GREEK, THE IDEA WAS THAT OF SOMETHING SACRED THAT IS NOT ACCESSIBLE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC.

IN THE BIBLE, THE TERM IS USED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS DEPENDING UPON THE CONTEXT. NOW, TO THIS QUESTION. OCCASIONALLY “SANCTIFIED” TAKES ON A SPECIAL SENSE. FOR EXAMPLE, PAUL DECLARES THAT THE UNBELIEVER WHO IS MARRIED TO A CHRISTIAN IS “SANCTIFIED” BY THE BELIEVER (1 CORINTHIANS 7:14).

THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE MARRIAGE ITSELF SAVES THE NON-CHRISTIAN. IF THAT WERE THE CASE, THE APOSTLE WOULD NOT REFER TO THE UNION AS THAT OF A “BELIEVER” AND “UNBELIEVER.” THIS WOULD CONTRADICT NUMEROUS PASSAGES THAT REVEAL SALVATION MUST BE ACCESSED BY PERSONAL OBEDIENCE (ACTS 2:40; 2 THESS. 1:7-9; HEB. 5:8).

RATHER, THE SENSE SEEMS TO BE THAT THE UNBELIEVER, BEING IN CLOSE PROXIMITY WITH THE CHRISTIAN SPOUSE, IS IN A “SET APART” ENVIRONMENT — CUT OFF FROM THE TOTAL AND EXTREME GODLESS INFLUENCE OF THE WORLD. THE END RESULT IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE SINNER MAY BE WON TO THE LORD THROUGH SPOUSAL INFLUENCE.

W. E. VINE OBSERVED THAT “THE UNBELIEVING HUSBAND OR WIFE IS RELATIVELY SET APART THROUGH HIS OR HER BELIEVING PARTNER, AND ABIDING IN THE NATURAL UNION INSTEAD OF BREAKING IT APART BY LEAVING, RECEIVES A SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE HOLDING THE POSSIBILITY OF ACTUAL CONVERSION” (97). – WAYNE JACKSON

Diving Into The Details Of First Corinthians Chapter 7 Verse 15:

A Deep Look at 1st Corinthians 7 Verse 15

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AMERICA'S CULTURE WAR DOCTRINAL MATTERS | DIVORCE/MARRIAGE

A current misconception with regard to divorce and remarriage is the notion that 1 Corinthians 7:15 is “later revelation” which “modifies” or “clarifies” Matthew 19:9. It is argued that 1 Corinthians 7:15 permits the Christian, who is deserted by a non-Christian mate, to remarry on the sole ground of that desertion. On the other hand, Matthew 19:9, which permits remarriage **only** on the ground of fornication, applies strictly to Christian married to Christian and therefore is not to be considered applicable to the Christian who is married to a non-Christian. Several factors make such a viewpoint untenable:

First, the context of Matthew 19 is **divorce** (Matthew 19:3), while the context of 1 Corinthians 7 is **not** divorce, but of **marriage** propriety (1st Corinthians 7). Jesus applied God’s original marriage law (paraphrased from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 in Matthew 19:4-6) to the question of divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19:9. But Paul applied God’s general marriage law (paraphrased in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11) to several different questions which relate to celibacy and the legitimacy of marriage for widows/widowers, Christian/non-Christians/singles.

Second, it is fallacious to hold that if 1st Corinthians 7:15 relates to a Christian married to a non-Christian, Matthew 19:9 **must** refer exclusively to a Christian married to a Christian. Matthew 19:9 was uttered **in context** to a group of Jews who were seeking an answer to **their** question concerning **Jewish** divorce (Matthew 19:3). Jesus gave them an answer that was intended for them—as well as for all those who would live in the coming age. **He appealed to Genesis 2 which resides in a pre-Jewish context and clearly applies to all men—the totality of humanity. Genesis chapter 2 is of human race context. It reveals God’s ideal will for human marriage for all of human history—pre-Mosaic, Mosaic, and Christian.**

Though divorce and remarriage for reasons other than fornication was “allowed” (though not endorsed—Matthew 19:8) during the Mosaic period, Jesus made clear that the Jews had strayed from the original ideal because of their hard hearts. He further emphasized (notice the use of $\delta\epsilon$ [“but”] in Matthew 19:8-9) the original marriage law, which permitted divorce and remarriage for fornication alone, would be reaffirmed as applicable to **all** persons during the Christian age.

Prior to the cross, ignorance may have been “unattended to” (Acts 17:30), that is, God did not have a universal law, as is the Gospel (Mark 16:15), but with the ratification of the New Testament, all men everywhere are responsible and liable for conforming themselves to God’s universal laws of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. God’s original marriage law was and is addressed to **all** (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4). Christ’s application to the question of divorce was implied in the original law and therefore is addressed to **all** people (Matthew 19:9). Paul’s application to questions of sex, celibacy, and non-Christian mates is addressed to **all** people (1 Corinthians Chapter 7). Scripture harmonizes beautifully and God treats all impartially. Thus “to the rest” (7:12) **cannot** be applying to other marriage relationships since Jesus had already referred to **all** marriages (whether Jew or non-Jew, Christian or non-Christian).

Third, 1 Corinthians 7 doesn’t address different “classes” of marriages. The Corinthian letter was written in response to correspondence previously sent to the Apostle by the Corinthians (1:11; 5:1; 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). Thus, First Corinthians amounts to a point-by-point response to matters previously raised by the Corinthians themselves. When Paul refers to the general question of sexual activity and celibacy (7:1), he is alluding to the method by which he is organizing his remarks in direct response to questions asked by the Corinthians. Thus, “to the rest” (7:12) refers to the rest of the matters or questions about which the Corinthians specifically inquired (and to which Jesus didn’t make specific application while on Earth). These matters (not marriages) are easily discernible from what follows. *The “rest” of the questions would have included the following:*

1. *Should a Christian husband who has a non-Christian wife sever the relationship (vs. 12)?*
2. *Should a Christian wife who has a non-Christian husband sever the relationship (vs. 13)?*
3. *Are Christians somehow ceremonially defiled or rendered unclean by such a relationship (vs. 14)?*
4. *Are children born to such relationships ceremonially unclean (vs. 14)?*
5. *Is a Christian guilty of sin if his or her non-Christian mate severs the relationship (vss. 15-16)?*
6. *Does becoming a Christian mean that one should dissolve all conditions and relationships which were entered into before becoming a Christian (vss. 17-24)?*
7. *What should be the sexual and/or marital status of virgins and widows in light of the current period of distress (vss. 25-40)?*

All of these questions may be answered in light of and in harmony with Jesus' own remarks in Matthew 19. Jesus didn't **specifically** make application to these unique instances. He did not address Himself to the application of God's general marriage law to every type scenario (specifically, to the spiritual status of a Christian married to a non-Christian). Yet, His teaching applies to **every** case of marriage on the question of divorce.

Fourth, the specific context of 1 Corinthians 7:15 relates to the person who becomes a Christian, but whose mate does not. **The unbeliever now finds himself married to a different person (in the sense that his mate underwent a total change in thinking and morals, and began to live a completely different lifestyle).** The unbeliever consequently issues an ultimatum, demanding that his mate make a choice: "either give up Christ, or I'm leaving!" **To live in marriage with an unbeliever who makes continuance of marriage dependent upon the believer's capitulation (i.e., compromise of Christian responsibility or neglect of divinely-ordained duty) would amount to slavery (i.e., "bondage"—being forced to forego the Christian life).** But neither at the time the marriage was contracted, nor at the present time, has the Christian been under that kind of bondage (such is the force of the perfect indicative passive in Greek).

God **never** intended or approved the notion that marriage is slavery. Christians are slaves **only** to God—never to men or mates (Matthew 23:10; Romans 6:22; Ephesians 6:6; Colossians 3:24; Philemon 16). So, the Apostle Paul is saying that, though believer **is** married to unbeliever (and continues to be so), the believer is not to compromise his or her discipleship. To do so, to back away from faithful loyalty to Christ, at the insistence of the unbelieving mate, would constitute a form of **slavery** which was never God’s intention for marriage. To suggest that δεδουλωται (“bondage, enslaved, reduced to servitude”) refers to the marriage bond is to maintain that in some sense and in some cases the marriage bond is to be viewed as a state of **slavery**. But God does not want us to view our marital unions as slave relationships in which we are “under bondage.” If our marriage is scriptural, we are “bound” (δεο—1 Corinthians 7:27,39; Romans 7:2), but we are not “enslaved.” So, **Paul was not commenting on the status of a believer’s marital status (i.e., whether bound or loosed). Rather, he was commenting on the status of a believer’s spiritual responsibilities as a Christian in the context of marital turmoil generated by the non-Christian mate and calculated to derail the Christian’s faithfulness to Christ.**

Paul was answering the question: “How does being married to a non-Christian affect my status **as a Christian** if he/she threatens to leave?” He was **not** answering the question: “How does being married to a non-Christian affect my status **as a husband/wife** (with the potential for remarriage) when the non-Christian departs?” Jesus already had answered that question in Matthew 19:9—divorce and remarriage is permitted **only** upon the basis of your mate’s sexual unfaithfulness.

Summarizing, though God’s marriage law is stringent (for everybody), and though God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), nevertheless, there are times when an unbelieving mate will actually force the believer to make a choice between Christ and the unbelieving mate. To choose the mate over Christ—to acquiesce to a non-Christian mate’s demand to compromise one’s faithfulness in any area of obligation to God—would be to subject oneself to, and to transform the marriage into, a state of slavery or “bondage.” Yet, the believer is not now and never has been in such enslavement. The believer must let the unbeliever exit the relationship in peace.

The believer must “let him depart”—in the sense that the believer must not seek to prevent his departure by compromising his loyalty to Christ. Of course, the Christian would continue to hold out hope the marriage could be saved. If, however, the non-Christian forms a sexual union with another, the Christian is permitted the right to exercise the injunction of Matthew 19:9 by putting away the non-Christian solely **on the grounds of fornication**, freeing the innocent Christian to marry an eligible person.

Fifth, one final factor to consider. Verses 17-24 **cannot** be requiring an individual to remain in whatever marital state he or she is in at the time of conversion. Paul uses both the examples of slavery and circumcision to show that, merely because an individual becomes a Christian, he is not absolved of his pre-Christian circumstances. If he is [an actual] slave **prior** to his baptism, he will continue to be a slave **after** his baptism. Such is why Paul instructed Onesimus to **return** to his position of servitude (Philemon 12). *So, Paul was encouraging the person who becomes a Christian, but whose mate does not become a Christian, to **remain in that marriage** rather than for them to think that becoming a Christian somehow gives him or her the right to sever the relationship with the non-Christian mate.* Being married to a non-Christian mate is not sinful in and of itself. But Paul wasn't placing his stamp of approval upon relationships, practices, and/or conditions that were **sinful** prior to baptism and then encouraging Christians to remain in those relationships. **Such would contradict what he later tells the Corinthians concerning unequal yokes (2nd Corinthians 6:17) and repentance (7:8-10).** Instead, he was referring to relationships and conditions that **weren't sinful** prior to baptism.

Christians still have the same obligations to conduct themselves as appropriate (according to God's laws) within those pre-conversion situations, though they have now become Christians. Such conduct applies to **any** relationship, practice, or condition that was not sinful (i.e., in violation of Christ's laws) prior to baptism. But this directive does **not** apply to any practice or relationship that was sinful prior to baptism (i.e., adultery, homosexuality, evil business practices, etc. cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).



FROM THE CHRISTIAN COURIER

What's the Meaning of "Not under Bondage" (1 Cor. 7:15)?

In 1 Corinthians 7:15, Paul affirms that if an unbelieving mate abandons his Christian companion the Christian is "not under bondage." Some allege that this provides an additional cause for divorce — other than fornication (Mt. 5:32; 19:9). But is there real evidence for this position? Would you address 1 Corinthians 7:15? Does desertion by non-believing mates grant the abandoned Christians the right of remarriage?

In First Corinthians, chapter 7, the apostle Paul responds to a number of questions that had been submitted to him by various members of the church at Corinth (cf. 1 Cor. 7:1). Some of these queries had to do with the relationship of a believer who is married to an unbeliever.

For example, should a Christian leave his or her unbelieving spouse? Paul's answer was in the negative — not if the unbeliever is content to keep on dwelling with the Christian (1 Cor. 7:12-13). The "sanctified" environment of a home in which the influence of the gospel is found could lead to conversion of the heathen partner (1 Cor. 7:14; 1 Pet. 3:1).

But what if the unbeliever should not be content to remain with the Christian, and he “departs” (**chorizetai**, literally “separates himself”)? What should the Christian do? Paul says that the child of God “is not under bondage” in such cases (1 Cor. 7:15).

Some have argued that 1st Corinthians 7:15 provides a second cause for divorce (in addition to the “fornication” of Matthew 5:32; 19:9), and so, by implication, expands Jesus’ teaching, and authorizes a subsequent remarriage on the ground of the “desertion” by an unbelieving mate. **This view is commonly called the “Pauline privilege.”**

The theory certainly isn’t a new one. It was advocated by Chrysostom (c. A.D. 347-407), one of the so-called “church fathers.” It became a part of Catholic Canon law and was defended by Martin Luther. This view, we are convinced, is unwarranted and constitutes a compromise of the Lord’s teaching on divorce and remarriage.

Let’s Look at the Context

This theory **reads into the context that which simply is not there.**

Here are the facts. The Corinthian saints were asking many questions relating to marriage. **From the nature of their questions, they had been influenced by a proto-Gnostic philosophy that asserted sexual relations were *intrinsically evil*.**

Here are some of the questions they were asking:

- Should a Christian husband and wife separate from (**chorizo**) or leave (**aphiemi**) each other (1 Cor. 7:10-11)? Paul’s answer was no. But should a separation occur, celibacy should be maintained or else a reconciliation effected.
- Should a Christian leave his unbelieving mate? Again, Paul’s response was no, not if the unbeliever is willing to remain with the believer (1 Cor. 7:12-13).

- What if the unbeliever initiates a separation? What should the Christian do? Let him go, the apostle says. The Christian is not enslaved to that mate in the sense that **domestic proximity** is absolutely required (1 Corinthians 7:15). “Divorce” is not under consideration here. The New Testament term for divorce is **apoluo** (literally, to loose away; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3,7-9; Mark 10:2-4,11-12; Luke 16:18), and that word is **meticulously avoided** in First Corinthians 7:10-15.

Paul Versus Jesus?

Was Paul issuing a teaching **different** than what Christ taught? **No!**

Paul makes it clear that the general theme under consideration in this context had not been **comprehensively** dealt with by the Lord. The Lord had taught concerning **some** matters — “not I, but the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:10), but not with reference to **other** matters — “say I, not the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:12).

However, regarding **divorce**, Christ had spoken comprehensively (note the “whosoever” and “everyone” (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:9)). Thus, the subject being reviewed in First Corinthians 7:10-15 **was not that of divorce**.

Does “Not Under Bondage” Mean Divorce Is Permitted?

The word rendered “bondage” (1 Cor. 7:15) is the Greek term **douloo**, which means “to make a slave of.” Observe how the word is translated in Titus 2:3 — “**enslaved** to much wine.”

Biblically speaking, marriage is **never viewed as slavery!** “Bondage,” or enslavement, doesn’t refer to the marriage union. If the unbeliever departs, that is not the Christian’s responsibility. The brother or sister is not enslaved to maintain a **togetherness** (note the allusion of 1 Cor. 7:5) at the expense of fidelity to the Lord.

Interestingly, **douloo** (under bondage) in verse 15 is, in the Greek Testament, a perfect tense form, **dedoulotai**. The perfect tense used denotes a present state resulting from past action. Its force here is this: “**was** not bound [past action] and **is** not bound [present state].” The sense of the verse thus is:

*Yet if (assuming such should occur) the unbeliever separates himself, let him separate himself: the brother or sister **was not** [before the departure] and **is not** [now that the departure has occurred] enslaved.*

Whatever the “bondage” is, therefore, the Christian was not in it **even before** the disgruntled spouse left. But the saint **was married** (and is) to him, hence, **the bondage is not the marriage!**

Let the reader substitute the word “marriage” for “bondage,” giving the full force to the perfect tense (i.e., “has not been married, and is not married”) and the fallacy of viewing the bondage as the marriage itself will be apparent.

1 Corinthians 7:15 does not expand upon the Savior’s teaching with reference to divorce and remarriage, as much as some wish that it were so.

Note. Some contend the term **chorizo** is used in verse 15 of divorce. The word is related to **choris** which means “separately, apart, or by itself.” **Chorizo** simply means to “divide” or “separate” (Romans 8:35; Hebrews 7:26; Philemon 15). The term is generic, and thus may include divorce, as Matthew 19:6 indicates, but there is no indication that it means divorce in either 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 15 (although some lexicographers, leaving their areas of expertise and assuming the role of commentators, have so designated it).

Professor Lewis Johnson notes:

“It is true that the verb ‘to depart’ in the middle voice [it is middle in verse 15] was almost a technical term for divorce in the papyri ... This, however, really proves nothing here” (1962, 1240).

Additional Testimony Regarding 1 Corinthians 7:15

“We are not, however, to suppose ... that the marriage was, in such a case, ipso facto dissolved, so that the believing party might contract a fresh one. This is alike at variance with the letter and spirit of our Lord’s decision (Matthew 5:32); and, indeed, with the Apostle’s own words in this Chapter ... the conjugal union is not to be dissolved by reason of difference in religion; yet if the unbelieving party will be disposed to separate, the believing party may blamelessly submit to such separation” Bloomfield 1837, 119).

“If the heathen husband or wife is resolved upon separation, they must be allowed to separate. The Christian is not a slave in such matters, although the Christian’s duty is to labor for peace and agreement. The separation that’s here spoken of isn’t a separation allowing the Christian man or woman to marry again during the lifetime of the heathen spouse. It is separation, not divorce” (Woodford 1881).

“In such circumstances, where the unbeliever was unwilling for cohabitation, the believing partner did not need to feel bound to persist in seeking reconciliation since God’s calling was to peace, not discord ...” (Harris 1971, 535).

“Many have supposed that this means that they would be at liberty to marry again when the unbelieving wife or husband had gone away; ... But this is contrary to the strain of the argument of the apostle” (Barnes 1956, 119).

*“We cannot safely argue with Luther that **ou dedoulotai** implies that the Christian, when divorced by a heathen partner, may marry again ... All that **ou dedoulotai** clearly means is that he or she isn’t so bound by Christ’s prohibition of divorce as to be afraid to depart when the heathen partner insists on separation” (Robertson and Plummer 1958).*

*“Paul has not said in that verse (7:15) or anywhere else that a Christian partner deserted by a heathen may be married to someone else. All he said is: ‘If the unbeliever departeth, let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage (**dedoulotai**) in such cases: but God hath called us in peace.’”*

To say that a deserted person **'hath not been enslaved'** is not to say that he or she may be **remarried**. What is meant is easily inferred from the spirit that dominates the whole chapter, and that is that everyone shall accept the situation in which God has called him just as he is ... If an unbelieving partner deserts, let him or her desert. So, remain" (Caverno 1939, 866).

"What does 'not in bondage' mean? The fathers, at least to some extent, the older interpreters, understood it meant **not in bondage** to keep up the marriage connection, and hence, at **liberty** to contract a new one. The interpretation has had wide effects. In the canonical law a believing partner was allowed, if thrust away by an infidel one, to marry again; and as the early Protestant theologians extended the rule, by analogy, to **malicious desertion**, an entrance-wedge was here driven into the older ecclesiastical laws, and much of the shocking facility of divorce in some Protestant countries has flowed from this source. **But we reject the interpretation. We hold ... that the apostle means 'not under bondage' to keep company with the unbeliever at all events, without having the thought of remarriage in mind. This must be regarded, we think, as settled by the soundest exegesis"** (McClintock and Strong 1968, 841).

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